



Virginia Commonwealth University  
**VCU Scholars Compass**

---

Theses and Dissertations

Graduate School

---

2014

inhale. exhale.

Jared Cru Smith  
*Virginia Commonwealth University*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd>



Part of the [Fine Arts Commons](#)

© The Author

---

Downloaded from

<http://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd/3387>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact [libcompass@vcu.edu](mailto:libcompass@vcu.edu).

© Jared Cru Smith 2014  
All Rights Reserved

# inhale. exhale.

A Thesis Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University

By

Jared Cru Smith

BFA, Herron School of Art and Design, 2011

MFA, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2014

Area Director: Heath Matysek-Snyder

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, CRAFT/MATERIAL STUDIES, SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

Virginia Commonwealth University

Richmond, Virginia

May, 2014

## Acknowledgements.

To my parents.

I would like to say thank you to both of you for all of your support through the years. Without you I would not be where I am today. I love you both!

To my champion leader, Heath Matysek-Snyder.

Stay beautiful! You have put up with me through these two years as your first graduate at VCU, and for that I am grateful for your kind hearted support, leadership, and most of all friendship.

To my committee.

Heath, Sonya, Susie, and Bo... thank you for steering me through these two years. With your encouragement and expertise I have refined what it is that I do.

To my peers.

We survived!!!

Best of luck to all in future endeavors.

To Leigh Suggs.

Thank you for all the long conversations we have had over the past six months. They not only have helped me learn and grow as a maker but also as a person. I know it is a struggle to get me to talk at times but it has helped in more ways than you could imagine.

## Table of Contents.

|                    |     |
|--------------------|-----|
| Acknowledgements.  | iii |
| Table of Contents. | iv  |
| List of Figures.   | v   |
| Abstract.          | vi  |
| History.           | 7   |
| Influences.        | 8   |
| The Search.        | 9   |
| inhale. exhale.    | 18  |
| Conclusion.        | 24  |
| Curriculum Vitae.  | 25  |

## List of Figures.

1. *Untitled: table*
2. *Whisper*
3. *Untitled: nestling bench*
4. *barn studies*
5. *629 miles...*
6. *(moon)shine*
  - a. *(moon)shine*
  - b. *(moon)shine*
7. *Untitled: illuminated void*
8. *untitled: bucket cluster*
9. *bucket list*
  - a. *divided*
  - b. *empty*
  - c. *hanging on*
  - d. *slumped*
  - e. *trapped*
10. *untitled: rock pile*
11. *untitled: line fragments*
12. *inhale. exhale.*
  - a. *phase one*
  - b. *phase one (alternate view)*
  - c. *phase one (alternate view)*
  - d. *phase one (detail)*
  - e. *phase one (detail)*
  - f. *phase one (detail)*

Abstract.

# inhale. exhale.

By Jared Cru Smith, MFA

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2014.

Area Director: Heath Matysek-Snyder

Assistant Professor, Craft/ Material Studies Department, School of the Arts

I did not become a farmer or railroader like generations of my family before me— but I continue to rely on my hands and physical labor. The use of my hands as tools to construct through woodworking and metal fabrication techniques becomes a musing action. Using wood and metal as materials, I develop structures in an exploratory way to frame the endless process of making. When I lose myself in this progression of forms, I allow myself to breathe.

## History.

I grew up in a small, rural, blue-collar town in Northeastern Indiana. My father was a blue collar man, his father was a blue collar man, and so on down the line. As a child I did not want to be the policeman, firefighter, professional athlete or doctor that other boys my age wanted to be. I wanted to be a farmer. Even though it was not a railroader like my father, it was someone who worked hard at what he did. As a young boy, farming was something I saw on a daily basis, but I did not know what or why they did what they did. All that mattered was they had large machines to drive, large barns to fill, they worked outside, and getting dirty was a job requirement. As I grew older, the luster of farming faded. The imagery of barns and silos, however, has stayed with me.



## Influences.

One of my earliest influences was Frank Lloyd Wright. At a young age I fell in love with architecture and most importantly the work of Wright. From the clean lines and minimal forms to the use of working with the landscape, I see Wright's work influencing me for years to come.

In undergraduate, I was exposed to works of Richard Serra, Martin Puryear, and Anish Kapoor. The scale alone drew me in. Now I am drawn to Serra more than before, relating his work to the development of my ideas. Whether it is through the use of materials, the process, his ideas of balance or his perception of space and body, I find Richard Serra to be a large influence in what I am currently making. With Puryear, I am influenced by his concepts of artificial perspective as well as letting the work be itself through whatever quality is put into the work. I am also drawn to Puryear because of his use of materials, his choice in materials often relates to the history of a material. The making process also becomes a big generator of ideas for him likewise for myself.

## The Search.

I was headed to graduate school. This move was a giant leap for me, both as a person and as a maker. The only direction that I had was that of the GPS unit affixed to my windshield. Upon arriving in Richmond, I settled into town and into the studio. I no longer had my GPS unit in front of me. I felt lost. Being in this new town, this new studio, with no clear direction, I decided to do what I do best. Make. This would lead me in some kind of direction, even if only to familiarize myself with the shop and the machines in it.

Shortly into my graduate school experience, I was faced with a question: "Why do I make?" At the time I replied "because that is what I do, I find comfort and ease in making." I knew then, that I wanted to dig deeper into this question, to find a response that could grow beyond what I knew and what I expected of myself as a maker. I began my search for a legitimate answer...

I decided to make a table. It was a simple table. Not much else to it. In an attempt to interject meaning, I added a fictitious narrative. Using a safety deposit box as a drawer, I applied gold flocking to the inside of the box — thinking of the wealth that once was held inside. I found the addition of narratives unappealing.



**Figure 1.** *untitled: table*

Seeking a new solution, I made *Whisper*, an interactive piece that resembles an old covered bridge and based it on my memory of yelling in tunnels to friends on the other end. It required the audience to climb a precarious structure, open a small door, and speak into a tube. Your voice carried into the tube around a 90° bend and into the ear of a participant on the other end, allowing whispered communication back and forth. I was satisfied with the interactive aspect of the work, but the nostalgic storyline did not satisfy me.



**Figure 2.** *Whisper*

When I drove home for Christmas, the long 10 hour drive was refreshing. Inspired by the road trip and overwhelmed with a feeling of homesickness, the drive allowed me to look at the rural landscape with fresh eyes. When I arrived back in Richmond, I began looking at maps. I was thinking of home and place and what those concepts meant to me. I chose to work with aerial maps of the places I had called home and create a bench made from rebar and wood. For the top of the bench, the outlines of Fort Wayne, Indianapolis, and Richmond dictated the shape of each resting place. Carved out of wood, these cross sections were a starting point for charting my own growth, documenting the time by adding a ring for each year I had spent in that city as well as how old I was. The base of the bench, made from bent rebar, brought these three tops together similar to that of nesting tree stumps.



**Figure 3.** *untitled: nesting bench*

I was working with maps and place but I still felt lost along with spending too much time making things that I either was not satisfied with or were not directions I wanted to work in. I found myself completely losing interest. I challenged myself with rapid exercises. I wanted to construct something quickly so I could finish before losing interest. My solution was to make small, geometric barn forms that needed to be completed within a day. Through these barn studies I was finally making objects that meant something to me.



**Figure 4.** *barn studies*

My last piece of the year connected my idea of personal mapping and the barns studies. 629 miles... portrayed the actual driving route that I have taken from Richmond to Indianapolis. I used distressed wood slats to create geometric forms as a way to illustrate the barns I often saw along the course that I had traveled. The tops of the twelve barns mimicked the long stretches of road through the open fields to short, quaking juts in the mountains. The tops also created the contour line of the path I had taken several times. Three of the barns function with doors or a drawer, one at each beginning or ending depending on which way you are coming from, and one in the middle. 629 miles... stretched across a 21' wall.



**Figure 5.** 629 miles...

After candidacy, I decided to make a larger barn form, titled (moon)shine. I wanted to take the form to a scale that was more suitable for furniture, as well as bring the form off of the wall. I was interested in the evening silhouettes barns created by either light radiating out from within or light casting over the barns from the moon. With this idea, I wanted to add light to the interior of the form allowing a glow to appear out of the barn. By adding three doors to the piece, it not only gave more function to the work but also allowed the light to escape more or less in different areas.



**Figure 6a.** *(moon)shine*



**Figure 6b.** *(moon)shine*

Over the summer, I spent time thinking about the objects that I use from the home improvement store and how those could possibly be turned into furniture objects or sculptural forms. I had several 5-gallon buckets in my studio I used for mixing or storing things. I decided one evening to wire a bucket and light it from within, I was intrigued by the way the bucket illuminated in the darkness, as if the bucket had created a white void in the shadows of the room. With this direction, I created a large cluster of twenty-five lit buckets that hung from orange extension cords.



**Figure 7.** *untitled: illuminated void*





**Figure 8.** *untitled: bucket cluster*

I continued to work with the 5-gallon bucket but still had no clear direction as to what I was doing. Within my extended search, I created *Bucket List*, a series of investigations with the bucket. I started to expose the buckets to high temperatures causing them to slump into new forms. I also experimented with fluorescent green snow fencing as a way to create an exterior layer to wrap the forms and produce positive/negative structures. I realized I was placing my emotions of being overwhelmed into these forms. *Divided. Empty. Hanging on. Slumped. Trapped.*



**Figure 9a.** *Bucket List: Divided*



**Figure 9b.** *Bucket List: empty*



**Figure 9c.** *Bucket List: hanging on*



**Figure 9d.** *Bucket List: slumped*



**Figure 9e.** *Bucket List: trapped*

With the slumped buckets from *Bucket List* I noticed elements that were usually found within rock formations: folds, curves, and layers. Wanting to research these forms more, I took a field trip to Carter Caves in Kentucky where I explored the structures created inside the caves. Upon my return to Richmond, I started to work through new ideas inspired by the caves with the use of models. With the intention to work larger, the models helped flush out ideas more quickly and also allowed me to see these ideas in three-dimensions and to scale. Enthused by the geometric shapes I was forming in the models, I collected hardwood scraps around my studio. Using the electric disc sander, I



was able to shape the wood into profiles of rocks. This process was a quick way for me to create individual geometric forms but time consuming to assemble a larger mass.



**Figure 10.** *untitled: rock pile*

These wooden shapes lead to making larger steel forms based on the line quality of these wooden shapes. I had been thinking a lot about line, and how a line can create or divide a space as well as create a positive and negative volume. I was looking at the *untitled: line fragment* forms as a three dimensional blueprint of a rock. If you were able to strip away the exterior planes of the rock, you would be left with the line forms I was creating. Intrigued by how the lines would compress against a flat surface, I chose to hang them on a white wall. Allowing the structures to appear as a drawing as well as three dimensional forms. The shadows helped to add another layer to the composition through softer lines that intersect with the darker, rigid lines.



**Figure 11.** *untitled: line fragments*

inhale. exhale.

I look at my hands and see calluses and scars that have formed; these marks are a record of my actions. My hands are not just hands; they are tools to make; the most important set of tools I could possess. These devices are what lead the way in my process. The action of making has become a place for me to escape, to be in my own world, and to meditate allowing myself to breathe.

There are conscious decisions made in the development of my work that start with a concept followed by a series of questions. What? Why? How? Scale? More specifically, what materials to use? Why these particular materials? How will it be constructed and at what scale? The choices I make relate to the concept but are strongly connected to the history of the subjects. Considering my work is inspired by the geometry in architecture and landscapes; I think about the history of these subjects and whether their story is clearly known or forever forgotten. Why and how they exist intrigues me, I see the geometry of the architecture or landscape as an explanation to how these structures were formed. I relate the geometry of these configurations to the construction of my own work. They also inform the shapes that I use in my work.

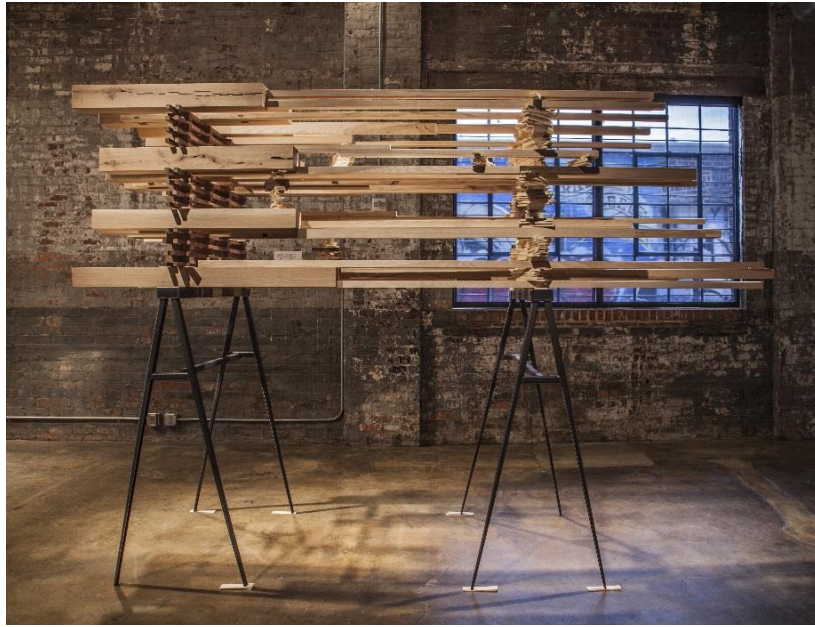
After decisions are made, the action of making begins. This is where my hands and eyes take over and my mind goes into cruise control. I start with a general plan of attack but in the development of the work, things change. During the course of making, formal choices are made with my hands and eyes. Once I have completely submerged myself into the process, I am in another world. My body language changes, my mood changes, my pace changes. I compare this rhythm of working to the rhythm of breathing. It is constant and unconscious. My body begins to depend on it. My body craves it. My body needs it to survive.

phase one is the work of my thesis exhibition inhale. exhale. The work is constructed with layers of material, wood and steel, to make one singular composition. Though the work is minimal, it covers the entire spectrum of my research: architecture, landscape, history, geometry, material, process, and self.



**Figure 12a.** *phase one*





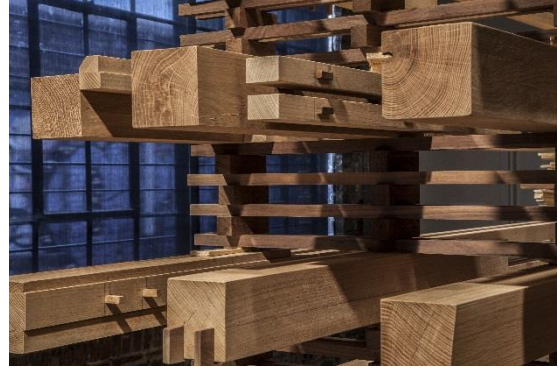
**Figure 12b.** *phase one* (alternate view)



**Figure 12c.** *phase one* (alternate view)



**Figure 12d.** *phase one (detail)*



**Figure 12e.** *phase one (detail)*



**Figure 12f.** *phase one (detail)*

Through the physical labor and long hours I put into my processes, my body feels pain. This aching of the body is inherent in my lineage. I feel a satisfaction when I have worked my body so hard that I am unable to lift myself from bed the next morning. It is as though I need to physically feel something and the only thing I can feel is the pain from this fixation of making. This is when I realize that my work is made for myself; for me to feel, for me to lose myself in a world that I know, for me to breathe.

phase one is built from 16 white oak, ash, and walnut timbers, walnut stickers, and approximately 701 shims and rests on top of towering steel sawhorses. The wood species are common domestic hardwoods and provide a color palette of light, medium, and dark. The blue and gray colors in the steel contrast well with the warm tones of the hardwoods. The structural steel also provides support for the considerable weight the 16 timbers create. Although not typically used in the storage of lumber, I used walnut for the cribbing and stickers because it physically and visually separates the rows of timbers. The construction shims are a wedge form generally used in construction to temporarily level or square a form into place until it can be permanently secured. I chose to work with the shims as a way to level and square the sawhorses and timbers. Using the common construction material alludes to the idea of impermanence and precariousness.

Within this stack, there are countless variations. The characteristics of the wood itself – knots, grain, checks – dictated locations of specific cuts and placements of joinery. To buy rough-cut lumber and then open it up through milling is always a surprise and something I wanted to draw attention to through my processes.

The sawhorses of phase one are fabricated from raw structural steel, and are meant to be taller than an average sawhorse. I wanted to lift the stock to viewing height to give the bundle of timbers importance. The overall composition is taller than the viewer, to relate the work on an architectural scale. The shims used at the footprint of the sawhorses are site-specific to the architecture; the number of shims and placement of the shims can vary depending on the location of the piece.

The final composition for phase one came from within me. I started by leveling the sawhorses with the floor, squared them to the room so that the viewer would be

aware of the architecture around them, and then I began to build the stack layer by layer, positioning the timbers in a manner that felt right. The timbers were leveled on one end by adding walnut cribbing and stickers, the opposite end was then leveled with randomly placed construction shims. Occasionally I would add walnut cribbing to help balance out a larger section as well as to add more height to the stack. After each piece was level I would make sure that it was square to the walls and to the sawhorses.

The timbers and the cribbing and stickers are stacked in a similar manner as a foundation for a building in an earthquake zone. This matrix system allows for the building to move with the quake rather than being rigid and holding against the quake. As for phase one, it allows the stack to move as one with any vibrations in the room or if it happened to be bumped by a passerby.

I see phase one as the beginning of what is to come. It is stock waiting for further exploration. I used these materials to make my own material — to be able to add or subtract from the material to allow the work to grow into something new. These components can be arranged in numerous ways. Whether this is adding on to the orientation of the work or totally changing the work. phase one is exactly that, it is the first phase of this body of work.



## Conclusion.

In looking back through my time at VCU, I realized much of what I was doing was searching for an answer to the question, "Why do I make?" These explorations of forms, materials, and ideas were all a subconscious search for an answer. At the time not knowing why my ideas and work were constantly changing, I would lose interest in a piece before I was able to finish it. I felt it was just something I did not want to pursue, but now I know it was because the answer was not there.

I now have an answer to that question... I make because of the process.

Through the use of different materials and techniques I am able to satisfy multiple emotions. I am not always able to articulate my thoughts through words. Instead I see my hands as translators for my mind. There is a comfort within my hands, when they are busy with making I feel as if I am in a world of my own. Making has become a meditative process for me. It is not about the final outcome, but about the troubleshooting and problem solving where I feel most comfortable.

Over the years I have developed a wide range of skills for making objects. My two main modes are through woodworking and metal fabrication. Woodworking is a slower paced process and metal fabrication is more of an instant process. Working at these two different speeds fits my personality as a maker, keeping my hands busy in a slow and meditative way as well as achieving instant results to satisfy my impatient side. The material is in hand and my hand is leading the way.

## Curriculum Vitae.

### **education:**

- 2014 M.F.A. Furniture Design/Woodworking  
Virginia Commonwealth University - Richmond, VA
- 2011 B.F.A Sculpture/Furniture Design  
Herron School of Art and Design - Indianapolis, IN

### **professional experience:**

- 2013 Adjunct Faculty - Furniture Design/Woodworking  
Virginia Commonwealth University - Richmond, VA
- Shop Monitor - Furniture Design/ Woodworking Area  
Virginia Commonwealth University - Richmond, VA
- 2012 Shop Monitor - Furniture Design/ Woodworking Area  
Virginia Commonwealth University - Richmond, VA
- 2011-13 Fabricator  
Indianapolis Fabrications - Indianapolis, IN
- 2011 Brian McCutcheon - Out of this World – Fabricator  
Indianapolis Museum of Art
- Mary Miss - Flow: Can you see the river? - Fabricator  
Indianapolis Museum of Art
- Shop Monitor - Furniture Design Department  
Herron School of Art and Design - Indianapolis, IN
- Teaching Assistant - Furniture Design Department  
Herron School of Art and Design - Indianapolis, IN
- 2009-10 Studio Assistant to Treva Mitchel  
Christel De Haan Private Estate - Indianapolis, IN

2009 Studio Assistant to Tom Streit  
Christel De Haan Private Estate - Indianapolis

2008-09 Gallery Attendant - Garrett Museum of Art - Garrett, IN

**exhibitions:**

2014 Faculty Selects - Furniture Society Conference - Port Townsend, WA  
inhale. exhale. - MFA Thesis Exhibition - The Depot - Richmond, VA  
New - Turchin Center for the Visual Arts - Boone, NC

2013 Life after Herron (Herron Alumni Show) - Marsh Gallery  
Herron School of Art and Design - Indianapolis, IN  
FO/MENT - artspace - Richmond, VA

2012 First Friday Preview - Bodega - Indianapolis, IN  
Art from the Heartland - Indianapolis Art Center - Indianapolis, IN  
5<sup>th</sup> Annual Local Artist Show - Garrett Museum of Art - Garrett, IN

2011 Holiday Showcase - Drapery Street - Carmel, IN  
Formtionality. - Harrison Center for the Arts - Indianapolis, IN  
Utilitopia - Solo Show - Flat 12 Bierwerks - Indianapolis, IN  
Final Frontier - Herron Sculpture  
Herron School of Art and Design - Indianapolis, IN  
Handle With Care - Marsh Gallery  
Herron School of Art and Design - Indianapolis, IN  
7 Pick 7 - Christopher West Presents - Indianapolis, IN  
4<sup>th</sup> Annual Local Artist Show - Garrett Museum of Art - Garrett, IN

2010 Sanctuary - Herron School of Art and Design Sculpture Gallery - Indianapolis, IN  
3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Local Artist Show - Garrett Museum of Art - Garrett, IN

2009 Herron School of Art and Design Student Show  
Eleanor Priest Reese & Robert B. Berkshire Galleries - Indianapolis, IN

**grants and awards:**

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| 2014    | Virginia Commonwealth University - Graduate Thesis Assistantship  |
| 2012-13 | Virginia Commonwealth University - Graduate Teaching Assistantship  |
| 2011    | Herron School of Art and Design - B.F.A. with Distinction Honors List<br>Nominee - Windgate Student Fellowship Award<br>Herron School of Art and Design - Dean's List |
| 2009    | Herron School of Art and Design - Dean's List<br>Edward R. Johnson Memorial Scholarship - Sculpture<br>Mark Milliken Award - Sculpture                                |
| 2008    | Herron School of Art and Design - Dean's List<br>Mary Husar Memorial Sculpture Award  |

***commissions / installations:***

|      |   |
|------|---|
| 2010 | Commission - Village at Fort Ben - Lawrence, IN               |
| 2009 | Finalist - IUPUI Library - Indianapolis, IN                   |
| 2009 | Finalist - Christel De Haan Private Estate - Indianapolis, IN |

***collections:***

|      |   |
|------|---|
| 2011 | Village at Fort Ben - Lawrence, Indiana   |
| 2008 | Garrett Public Library - Garrett, Indiana |

***memberships:***

|              |   |
|--------------|---|
| 2011-Present | The Furniture Society<br>Indianapolis Museum of Art |
| 2008-Present | Garrett Museum of Art                               |

**publications:**

2011 Nancrede, Sally Falk. "ONE-OF-A-KIND DESIGNS." The Indianapolis Star, Home Garden Sect. D, July 23, 2011.

Booher, William J. "Village art honors Fort Ben history." The North Indy Star, Section: Art Pg. 2. , July 28, 2011.

2010 Eastside Voice Community Newspaper Vol. 2 #20 Pg. A9. May 21, 2010. New Public Sculptures in Lawrence Showcased at "Toast the Arts" May 18.  
<http://atgeist.com/blog/public-sculptures-lawrence-showcased-toast-arts/>